GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
ABSTRACT

Protection of Hindu Devasthanam Lands – Certain Instructions – Issued.

Revenue (Endts.II) Department

G.O.MS.No. 211 Dated:17.06.2015.

Read

O R D E R:

It has come to the notice of the Government that several officials in various departments are frequently making efforts to identify Hindu temple lands for the purpose of undertaking various projects / schemes of their departments. Also whenever private parties are approaching them, officials of various departments are routinely showing Hindu temple lands for the purpose of establishing various projects by the private sector as well.

2. A case in point is the visit of the Superintendent of Police (Rural), Guntur district who visited the lands belonging to Lord Venkateswara temple and Lord Malleswara temple in Boppudi (V) in Guntur district. The S.P.(R) has done inspection of these lands and the matter has appeared prominently in local newspapers that the lands of these 2 ancient temples is proposed to be taken away for setting up of SP(Rural) office. It was also mentioned therein that High Court permission would be taken to go ahead for taking possession of these temple lands.

3. This approach of the Govt. officials is not appropriate for the following reasons:

i) There is a growing tendency among officials who presume that Devasthanam lands are easy pickings wherever a need is felt for procuring land. It is categorically stated that **Hindu temple lands are not Government owned lands. Government is only a custodian of Hindu temples** and this is a sacred trust undertaken by the Government.

ii) Hindu temple matters have to be dealt with greater sensitivity just as while dealing with the lands belonging to other religious denominations. Hence lands belonging to Hindu temples shall not be taken away casually by any department or offered to any private party routinely.

iii) Hindu Temples were endowed with lands by Kings, Zamindars and other Philanthropists who were devout Hindus. They had keen interest to protect Hindu Dharma and saw that successful functioning of temples was critical to this objective.

iv) The A.P.High Court has imposed a ban in 2008 on sale of temple lands. An impression has gained in the official circles that they only need to get court approval to take over temple lands in a routine manner. It is necessary to understand the context in which the court passed these orders. The Court had found merit in the representation of several Hindu organizations that Hindu temple lands were being taken away on a large scale for various purposes, a step considered insensitive to the religious needs of that particular religious denomination. This ban has not deterred some departments from making fresh proposals regularly.

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4) **Hence, Government after careful consideration hereby issue the following orders:**

i) However laudable the objectives of scheme/project may be, proposals for transfer / sale / alienation of Devasthanam lands shall not be made by any department either for any routine public purpose or for the purpose of giving it to a private party.

ii) If for any reason a particular land belonging to a Hindu temple / charitable trust has to be acquired, then the District Collectors / Heads of departments shall simultaneously send proposals to allot Government land to such temple. This alternate land should be of equivalent value which can be put to use by the temple to generate a regular stream of income. It should be near to the temple itself or near the existing temple land which is proposed to be taken away so that the temple administration will be in a position to safe guard the land and generate revenue for the maintenance of the temple. Without making this arrangement no temple land shall be proposed to be taken over hereafter by any department.

iii) Temple lands will be only leased, either in the short term or on BOOT basis in the long term that too after a careful assessment of the temples' needs

5. These orders come into effect immediately.

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE GOVERNOR OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

J.S.V. PRASAD
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT

To
All Departments of Secretariat.
All Heads of Departments.
All M.Ds. of all Govt. Corporations.
All District Collectors.
All Joint Collectors.

// FORWARDED :: BY ORDER //

SECTION OFFICER